DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 372 331 CG 025 633

AUTHOR Gomberg, Edith S. Lisansky
TITLE Facts on Women and Alcohol. Clearinghouse Fact Sheet.
INSTITUTION Rutgers, The State Univ., Piscataway, NJ. Center of Alcohol Studies.
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 4p.; For a related document, see CG 025 638. The New Jersey Alcohol/Drug Abuse Resource Center and Clearinghouse serves institutions of higher education, state agencies, communities, and school districts throughout the state of New Jersey by providing technical assistance, training, and resources in alcohol and other drug abuse education and prevention. Clearinghouse fact sheets may be reproduced for educational use.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Alcohol Abuse; Alcoholic Beverages; *Alcoholism; Behavior; *Drinking; Etiology; *Females; Sex Differences

ABSTRACT

Studies show that the percentage of women in the United States who drink, has remained stable over the last several decades. However, patterns in female drinking have changed, indicating a trend toward higher rates of heavy/frequent drinking among young women. Negative attitudes toward female intoxication still prevail and a double standard persists: intoxicated women are perceived as "worse" than intoxicated men. Theories about why women abuse alcohol include genetic endowment, inadequate coping mechanisms, depressed affect, problems in impulse control, traumatic events and losses, and heavy drinking persons in their environment. Alcoholic women are a heterogeneous group and they exhibit some differences from male alcoholics including: (1) women more frequently report a positive family history; (2) the process of becoming an alcoholic is of shorter duration; (3) the woman's mate is more likely to be a heavy/problem drinker than the male alcoholic's mate; (4) marital disruption is more likely; (5) the combination of alcohol and psychoactive medication is more usual; and (6) it is thought women encounter more barriers in seeking help. Financial problems, child care responsibilities, family pressures, and social stigma create some of the barriers women encounter, but once in treatment, it is believed that a woman's prognosis is similar to a man's. (RJM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 372 331

FACTS ON WOMEN AND ALCOHOL

by Edith S. Lisansky Gomberg

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CG025633

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. S. Battle

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

New Jersey Alcohol / Drug
RESOURCE CENTER AND CLEARINGHOUSE
Center of Alcohol Studies, Rutgers University

FACTS ON WOMEN AND ALCOHOL

Edith S. Lisansky Gomberg, Ph. D.

In virtually all societies that permit the use of alcohol, women as well as men are permitted to drink socially, although women generally drink less frequently and in lesser amounts than do men. In the United States, epidemiological studies show that the percentage of women who drink has remained stable over the last several decades. There are differences, however, in patterns of female drinking in the general population, varying with age, education, marital status, income, employment, race and the drinking status of the woman's spouse or lover. The changes in alcohol use by women over time indicate a trend toward higher rates of heavy/frequent drinking among young women; women in their twenties now show a higher rate of heavy drinking than other cohorts who were measured at the same age in the past. Young women appear more frequently in the drinking-and-driving statistics than they used to. Still another reflection of this trend appears in the lower average age of women now entering treatment facilities for alcohol-related problems, an average age lower than has been true in the past.

Attitudes toward female intoxication remain generally negative and a double standard prevails: an intoxicated woman is perceived as "worse" than an intoxicated man. This disapproval, which has persisted despite other changes in women's status (e.g., more women in the workplace, more sexual freedom) may be based on impairment in nurturant behavior, perceived greater sexual availability, or perhaps the greater likelihood of overtly expressed anger. Despite some recent shifts in sexual stereotypes, overt expression of anger or sexuality by women is still frowned upon. Whatever the reason, negative attitudes toward female drunkenness persist.

Why do some women develop alcohol abuse or alcohol dependence? Theories about etiology include: genetic endowment, inadequate personality mechanisms to cope with life stresses, depressed affect, problems in impulse control, traumatic events and losses, and heavy drinking persons (parent, husband, sibling, friend) in the social environment. Depression has long been associated with alcoholism in women but it is unclear whether depression precedes or follows the drinking. There is some research evidence, albeit retrospective, that women who develop alcohol problems as adults are more likely to have depressed feelings of being unloved and deprived, in childhood and adolescence, than women who do not develop drinking problems.

Alcoholic women are a heterogeneous group, differing by age at onset of drinking, ethnicity and social class, sexual orientation, use of other drugs, availability of social supports, and accompanying psychiatric symptomatology. Comparing the alcohol-dependent woman with the alcohol-dependent man, there are some commonalities, e.g., alcohol-related medical problems. There are also male/female differences. Among women with drinking problems:

(a) Positive family history is reported more frequently by women;

(b) The process of becoming an alcoholic is of shorter duration;

(c) The woman's spouse or lover is more likely to be a heavy/problem drinker than is true of the spouse or lover of the male alcoholic;

(d) Marital disruption is more likely;

(e) The combination of alcohol and psychoactive medication is more usual although the use of illegal drugs is less than among males;

(f) Dual diagnosis patterns show a higher frequency of neurotic disorders; among male alcoholics, antisocial personality (ASP) is more frequently the other diagnosis;

CG0256333

(g) Drinking is more likely to occur in private places and is more likely to be solitary drinking;

(h) Hepatic disorder appears proportionately more frequently among women while delirium tremens and alcohol-related accidents occur more frequently among male alcoholics;

(i) There is a risk of fetal effects of heavy drinking and, interestingly enough, the question of fetal effects of the male's heavy drinking has also been raised; and

(j) Barriers to seeking help and to staying in treatment are thought to be greater.

Barriers to seeking help for women include financial problems, child-care responsibilities, social stigma, and family pressures. There are few gender comparisons in treatment outcome studies, but it is generally believed at this time that prognosis is similar for both sexes. Families may be supportive or nonsupportive; where they are supportive, reconstruction of familial and other social networks is a priority. Alcoholic women may also need help with health problems, job training, effective parenting, and in establishing social networks which discourage return to alcohol. Women with alcohol problems who are members of ethnic minorities will probably benefit from ethnic-sensitive counseling.

Prevention of heavy drinking and alcohol problems among women may be linked either to antecedents (primary prevention) or to consequences (secondary prevention). Prevention strategies for women directed toward moderate drinking are needed.

Edith S. Lisansky Gomberg, Ph.D.
is a Professor of Psychology at the Department of Psychiatry, University of Michgan Alcohol Research Center, Ann Arbor, Michigan

References

Fillmore, K.M. (1987). Women's drinking across the adult life course as compared to men's. *British Journal of Addiction*, 82, 801-811.

George, W.H., Gournic, S.J., & McAfee, M.P. (1988). Perceptions of post-drinking female sexuality: Effects of gender, beverage choice, and drink payment. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 18, 1295-1317.

Gomberg, E.S.L. (1989). Alcohol and Women, *Rutgers Center of Alcohol Studies Pamphlet Series*. New Brunswick, NJ.

Gomberg, E.S.L. (forthcoming). Women and alcohol: Psychosocial aspects. In: D.J. Pittman & H.R. White (Eds.) *Society, Culture and Drinking Patterns, Reexamined*. New Brunswick, NJ: Center of Alcohol Studies Alcohol Research Documentation, Inc.

Popkin, C.L. (1989). Drinking and driving by young females. *33rd Annual Proceedings, Association for the Advancement of Automotive Medicine Conference*, Baltimore MD, October 2-4,1989, pp. 29-40.

Wilsnack, S.C. & Beckman, L.J. (1984). *Alcohol Problems in Women*. NY: Guilford Press.

Readings for Further Information

Bennett, L.A. and Ames, G.E. (Eds.) (1985). *The American Experience with Alcohol: Contrasting Cultural Perspectives*. NY: Plénum.

Strug, D.L., Priyadarsini. S., and Hyman, M.M. (Eds.) (1986). *Alcohol Interventions: Historical and Sociocultural Approaches*. NY: Hayworth, pp. 41 - 57.

Kissin, B. and Begleiter, H. (Eds.) (1986). *The Biology of Alcoholism, Vol. 6. The Pathenogenisis of Alcoholism: Psychosocial Factors*. NY: Plenum.

The New Jersey Alcohol / Drug Resource Center and Clearinghouse serves institutions of higher education, state agencies, communities and school districts throughout the state of New Jersey by providing technical assistance, training , and resources in alcohol and other drug abuse education and prevention. For more information on the Clearinghouse, call or write to:

Center of Alcohol Studies
Smithers Hall-Busch Campus
Rutgers University
New Brunswick, NJ 08903
(908) 981 - 0964

THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY
RUTGERS

CLEARINGHOUSE FACT SHEETS MAY BE REPRODUCED IN ANY QUANTITY FOR EDUCATIONAL USE © 1991

1-20,000